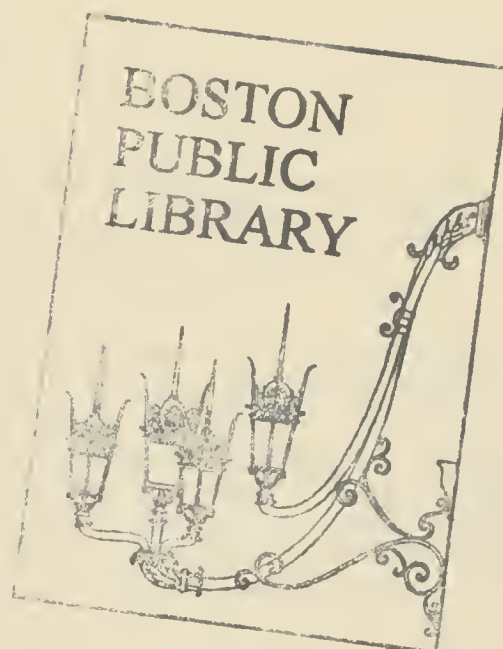


BRA

1689



A Fact Sheet  
on H.R. 1855

A Bill introduced by Congressman  
John J. Moakley to allow the  
City of Boston to build a fixed  
span bridge over the Fort Point  
Channel at Northern Avenue

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Questions and Answers  
concerning H.R. 1855

What does the bill do?

It allows the City of Boston, in cooperation with State and Federal agencies to build a fixed span Northern Avenue Bridge.

Where will the bridge be located?

It will be located about 150 feet to the south of the existing bridge over Fort Point Channel. This will allow the existing bridge to swing open during the construction process, and allow the bridge to remain open permanently to serve as an historic, sea-oriented museum and landing area.

Why is a new bridge needed?

The old bridge is rapidly deteriorating, and costs the City hundreds of thousands of dollars in temporary repairs, in addition to the cost of operating costs. The bridge must be replaced because of basic engineering facts about the old structure.

Where will the new road go?

The City is building a new, wide Northern Avenue from the area of the Boston Marine Industrial Park and the MassPort Third Containerport to Route I-93. This road is designed to help trucks by-pass the South Boston residential community.

How can you keep trucks out of the South Boston residential community?

The BRA has been working to design a "Seaport Access Road System" to connect the new seaport industrial areas with the regional expressway system. Proposed is one new road to the Southeast Expressway for trucks going south and west, and a new Northern Avenue to help trucks go north and east, (particularly to Logan Airport).

Why is it important for the bridge to have a permanent span?

The new roads will connect directly with the interstate highways, but if the bridge is open much of the time truckers and other commercial traffic will continue to avoid the bridge, and to find alternative routes - and many of those routes go by or through the residential community.



Will boats be able to go under the new bridge?

Yes, the new bridge will have a 15-foot clearance at high tide, and a 25-foot clearance at low tide. Most motor boats, barges and lobster boats will be able to go under the bridge. Larger sailboats will not be able to go under at full mast.

Will any industries be displaced by the project?

One. The McKie Lighter Company will be displaced by a new bridge, whether or not the bridge has a fixed span. They would be relocated at public expense in either case.

Will any other businesses be displaced by the bridge?

No. On the western shore, the road will fit into an unused piece of land between the Hook Lobster Co. and the Harborplace Office Building, both of which will stay. On the eastern shore, the road will go between the Neptune Lobster Co. and the Victoria Station Restaurant - both structures will remain.

Will any buildings be taken by the road?

No. From the Fort Point Channel to Pier Five, the new road will be located on unused land formerly owned by the Penn Central Railroad. No buildings will be taken by the bridge or the new road.

Will the fish/lobster companies be cut off from the sea?

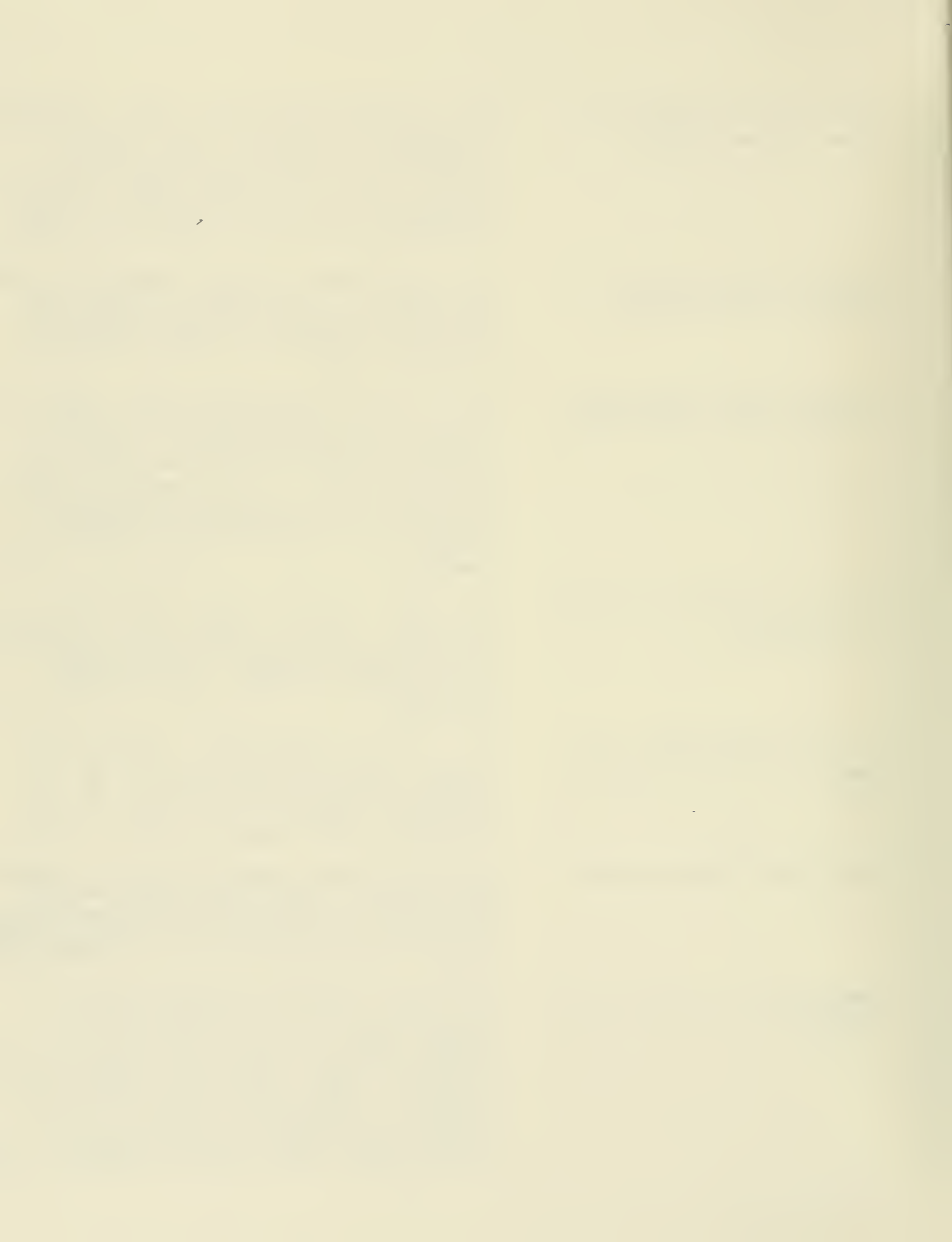
No. Just the opposite: the two companies (Hook and Neptune) are now located inside of the bridge. In the new plan, they will be located on the seaside of the bridge.

What about ocean vessels?

Many Bostonians remember when the Channel was used by large ocean-going vessels. But the last freighter to use the Channel left when the large sugar refining plant moved to Charlestown in the mid-1950's.

What about the rest of the Channel?

The U.S. Congress authorized the construction of a fixed span bridge at Summer Street, just two blocks down the Channel about ten years ago. The Congress Street Bridge is currently non-operable. Thus, boats that enter the Channel at Northern Avenue can only travel about 800 feet. There are no industrial users beyond Congress Street.



Shouldn't the Channel be used for water-related purposes?

Yes it should. The BRA has published a well-received study prepared by Sasaki Associates showing how the Channel between Northern Avenue and Congress Street can be used as a major marina for motor-powered pleasure boats.

What about sailboats?

Some smaller sailboats can go under the bridge at full mast, while the Sasaki study - and several independent studies - has proposed that a second marina area for larger masted boats be created just outside the new bridge.

What about the area south of Congress Street?

The water of the Fort Point Channel is a great, exploitable urban resource. The BRA plans for the area and emphasizes this great, unique resource. Small power boats can clear underneath the Summer and Congress Street bridges - whose clearances are higher than the fabled bridges over the River Seine in Paris.

So the Fort Point Channel could still be used by boaters?

Yes, very much so. At present the pleasure boats which dock at Russia Wharf and other locations must face a long, laborious process just to go in and out of the Channel, with later waits of a half-hour. These same boats will be able to steam in and out at will - any time night or day, no matter what is happening above.

Will we lose the "Calliope?"

No. This boat, which presently must wait for the bridge to open - just to make a short tourist trip - will now be able to go in and out on a quicker schedule, which means more trips per day. At present, the bridge's problems are causing the Calliope to move to a temporary dock away from the Museum. With the new bridge, the tourist shuttle can go right to the Museum, and Boston can work on a real, first-class tourist boat schedule.

What about the Brig Beaver?

The Brig Beaver will stay right where it is, and it will now be easier for most private motor boats to come in from the Harbor and bring visitors to the Tea Party site and the Museums.



What about visiting historic ships?

Under the BRA's Sasaki plan, the existing historic bridge will be turned permanently open. To the east a channel must be kept open; to the west of the open-span, will be an historic park area for pedestrians to approach the water. This would be an excellent dock for visiting historic ships, perhaps in cooperation with existing public institutions in the area.

Who supports the bill?

The bill is supported by community groups by Labor, by the City of Boston, by most area land owners, by the Chamber of Commerce, by MassPort, and by the fish industry of the area. The plans for the Seaport Access Road system have been developed with the support of community groups in South Boston who are trying to solve the problem of dangerous trucks through their local residential streets.

Do some oppose the bill?

Some individuals believe that the area between Northern Avenue and the Congress Street Bridge should not be made inaccessible to tall-masted sailboats and larger yachts. These private boat users believe that a movable span bridge should be built, to allow the boats entrance to the Channel by interrupting traffic circulation on Northern Avenue.

Has the BRA considered these arguments?

Yes. It is true that some boats will be excluded from the basin, while most private motor boats will gain an improved access to the Channel. For these craft, the BRA believes that a new mooring area can be created outside of the bridge. Overall, it has been determined that the industrial development of the South Boston peninsula, and the safe management of the truck traffic is the overriding issue in the project.

Does this mean that the Channel is declared non-navigable?

No. Under the bill, Congress gives Boston permission to build the fixed-span bridge. The Channel remains legally navigable, and subject to the administrative supervision of the Coast Guard and Army Corps of Engineers.



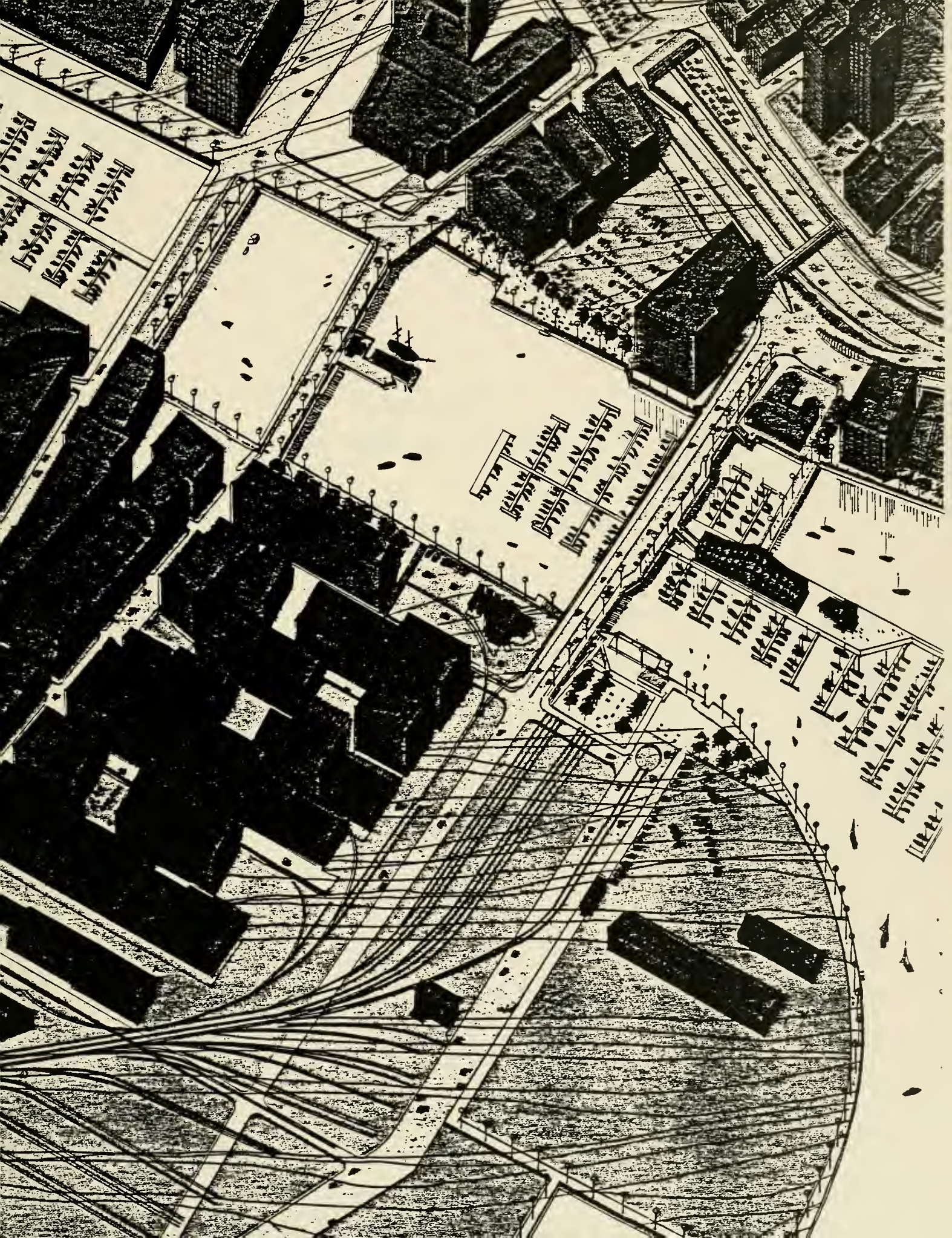
What about commuter boats?

Commuter boats would only be able to get to the Congress Street Bridge. Studies made by the State Office of Transportation have shown that commuter boat riders would be closest to most of their downtown destinations at Rowe's Wharf or Long Wharf than at Congress Street or even South Station.

Shouldn't these boats go to South Station?

No. Studies of long-distance commuter boat users show that 95% of riders walk to their destination, and that transferring to other modes for longer trips is rare. In addition, to have adequate schedules to South Station would require constant opening and closing of both a movable span Northern Avenue Bridge and a Congress Street Bridge. It would be difficult for a full schedule commuter service under these constraints. Commute are best served by direct harbor terminal locations.







Addendum to  
Fact Sheet on H.R. 1855

A History of Fort Point Channel  
Development



## History of the Fort Point Channel and the South Bay

What is presently the Fort Point Channel area was, until the early 19th century, marshland and tidal flats. Its western shore was known as South Cove, and to the east was known as Dorchester Flats. These shores led into the South Bay, which extended to Roxbury and terminated in the Roxbury Brook and Dorchester Creek. South Boston was an undeveloped area with ten families. Boston Neck and Roxbury, which made up the western shore of South Cove, were defense areas for Boston Proper during the Revolution, but was most important as the only roadway to the mainland.

Beginning as a farming village, Roxbury's economy was dependent on its crops and artisan trade, and the lowland along the Roxbury Neck was used primarily as pasturage and hay fields until the 1800's with some residential and commercial structures clustered along the neck road. With the growth of Boston after the Revolution, the marshland along the neck was divided and sold for development. The low lying neck land developed as a mixture of some residential and industrial buildings, initially built of wood and later of brick. Textile mills, ropewalks, a piano factory, Solomon Willard's clock company, lumber and stone yards appeared between Dudley Street and the Boston line.

Industrial development was facilitated by the development of the Roxbury Canal, begun in 1795, which provided a convenient source of transportation to and from Boston Harbor. The canal followed an old streambed along what is now Harrison Avenue. Rapid changes in transportation systems and the process of land-filling made much of the Roxbury Canal obsolete by 1820, and inland portions of it were filled in piecemeal over a period of sixty years.

In 1804, South Boston was annexed, and legislation was passed to allow land fill to create land for commercial development. The South Boston Bridge,



also known as the Dover/West Fourth Street, was opened as a fixed span/draw-bridge in 1805, the first of nine bridges to span the South Bay.

In 1805, the Front Street Corporation began land-fill operations in South Cove, beginning the expansion of Boston Neck. In 1833, the South Cove Associates continued development of the South Cove by filling 75 acres of mud flats for a large railroad terminus for the Boston and Worcester railroads. The western shore of the Cove was substantially completed by mid century.

In 1836, the Boston Wharf Company began its series of land fill operations along the east bank of the South Cove, between Dorchester and Northern Avenues. By the 1870's their reclamation had narrowed the waterway and established the eastern bank of a channel. Around 1870, dredging operations began in the Channel itself, to accomodate the larger vessels berthing in Boston. By 1890 the Boston Wharf Company filling operations were completed, and the Channel was protected by a seawall. The company had continually constructed docking facilities and warehouses and streets to serve their thriving industrial development.

"Boston by the late 19th century, was laced with a complex network of channels, canals and river entrances. The intersection of these busy waterways with an expanding road network developed on filled land created the need for scores of moveable bridges throughout the city. Travel in almost any direction from center of the city was often interrupted by the operation of these devices, which were a common feature of the waterfront. By the early 20th century eight such bridges crossed over Fort Point Channel to serve new development in South Boston. The importance of these structures can be judged by the fact that during the 1890's, nearly 19,000 vessels, steamers, sailing boats and tugs passed through the Congress Street Bridge carrying cotton, molasses, spices, wood, dye, fruit, shoes, and cattle, among other cargo. The seven which remain today include:

Dover/West Fourth St -- The earliest bridge route to South Boston was





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first built in 1805. It was rebuilt again in 1858 and the present structure dates back to 1876; it consisted of a fixed span and a simple drawbridge. Today, only the fixed portion remains.

Broadway-- first built in 1871, later replaced by a swing bridge in 1914.

Old Colony RR -- an 1886 drawbridge, later replaced by the rolling bascule bridge now servicing South Station.

Dorchester Avenue -- originally a retractible bridge, now fixed in place and owned by the US Postal Service.

Summer Street -- originally a railroad bridge, replaced in 1898 by a retractible bridge, where the current Summer Street was constructed. The retractible bridge type was a design unique to Boston and used at many locations. Today, only 2 remain: at Summer Street, which has been fixed in place, and further along the same route at L Street in South Boston, which still operates.

Congress Street -- a single leaf bascule bridge, built in 1930 to replace an earlier draw bridge. The current structure contains elegant light standards; its counterweight still hangs poised over Congress Street, although the bridge has been fixed.

Northern Avenue-- a 1908 swing bridge of steel and concrete; the last route across the channel to be opened to traffic!"<sup>1</sup>

The area at the turn of the century was a center for rail facilities which had begun operations in the 1840's. The combination of shipping, docks and wharves, and rail facilities supported this area as the heart of Boston's industrial waterfront. At the same time, Boston was losing its pre-eminence as the nation's major harbor, gained during the Clippership Era, to New York. This shift changed Boston from an active mercantile port to a center for steamship lines and railroad ferry terminal. Much of this activity occurred in the



banks of the Fort Point Channel.

By 1900, South Station was completed, uniting all southerly railroad lines under one roof. This terminal further contributed to the continued growth of the adjacent leather district and other manufacturing/warehousing activities on both sides of the Channel.

The Channel reached its height of port activity in the early 20th century. Boston's fishing center relocated from the Great Cove piers to South Boston, near the mouth of the Channel. The wool and ice industry had their warehousing and distribution center here as well. A major sugar refinery was located directly on the channel at its curve. The Boston Wharf Company warehouses served as a distribution center for the sugar and molasses concerns as well as lumber, coal, bananas, and leather. South of the wharves grew a manufacturing center. Machinery, iron, glass, brickyards, wagons, soap, elevators and beer were some of the varied products manufactured here, and distributed via the Fort Point Channel rail and shipping facilities.

Much of the South Bay remained open below the East Fourth Street bridge until the 1920's. The South End/Albany Street bank had been wharfed out in the 1880's and 1890's. These docks handled lumber, coal, and general building materials, and later on ice and small sugar concerns until the 1940's.

Across the Bay filling operations continued. The mud flats west of Dorchester Avenue and north of Southampton Street were reclaimed largely by the early 1920's for railroad yards. Still the Y-shaped waterway to the head of the Roxbury Canal and Dorchester Creek remained open until the 1950's.

The Fort Point Channels role as a shipping and distribution center began its decline by the 1940's. The wool industry was then severely threatened by the invention of synthetics. This also marked the beginning of the general decline of the New England region for manufacturing, as companies either went out of business or moved south and west, both a result of high energy costs and drying up of cheap labor previously supplied by immigrants. The Fort



# Boston Downtown Waterfront Project

Boston Educational Marine Exchange  
Pelleia Reed Clark, Project Director  
Lane/Frenchman, Inc., Urban Design Consultant

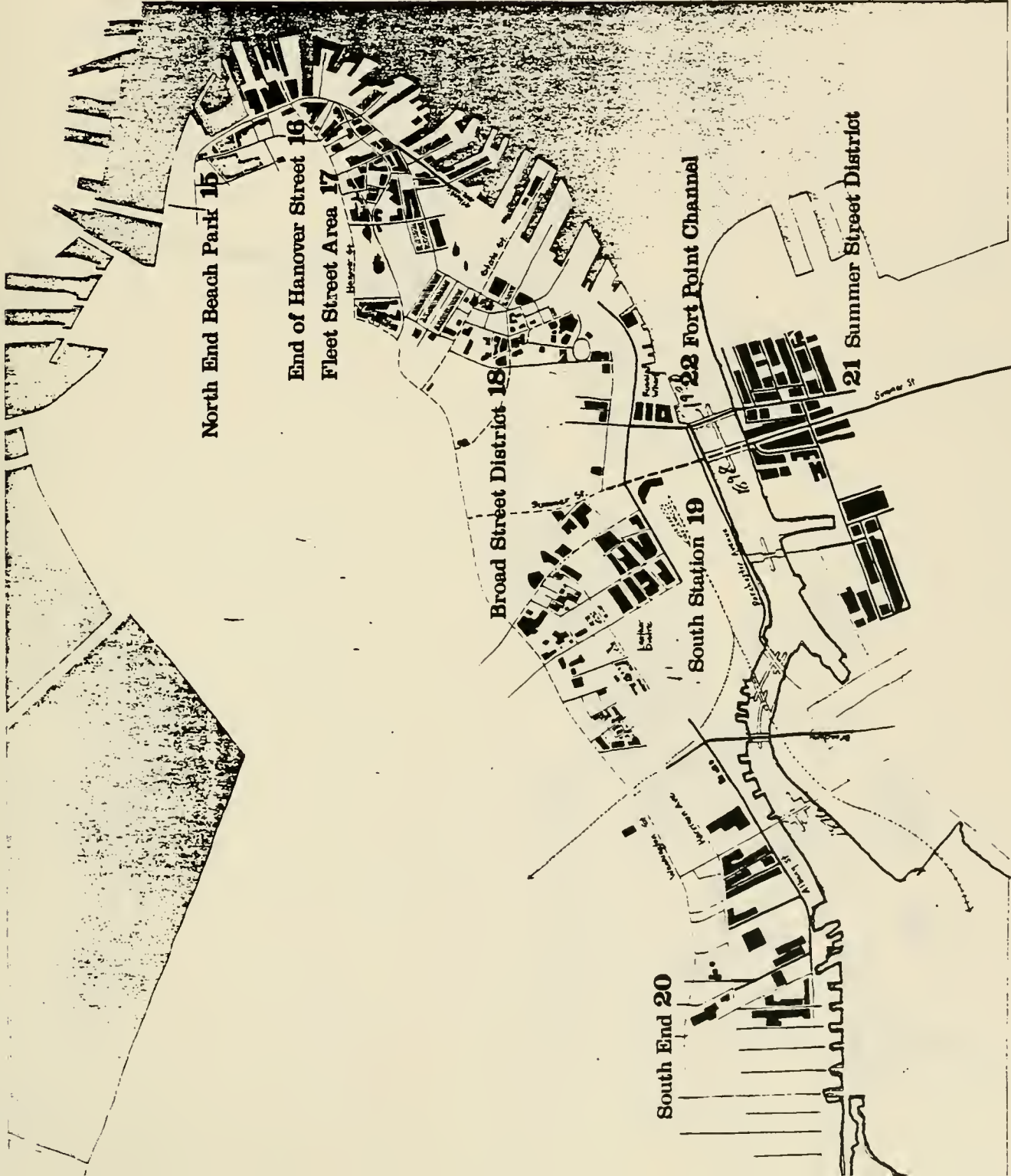
## 1900: The Industrial Waterfront

### Street Network

- Remaining Streets, 1850-1900
- Remaining Streets, pre-1850
- - - Earliest Routes to the Sea

### Sites & Structures

- Remaining Structures, 1850-1900
- Remaining Structures, pre 1850
- Sites in Contiguous Use



1000'



# Boston Downtown Waterfront Project

Boston Educational Marine Exchange  
Patricia Reed Clark, Project Director  
Lane/Frenchman, Inc., Urban Design Consultant

## 1980: The Waterfront Today

### Street Network

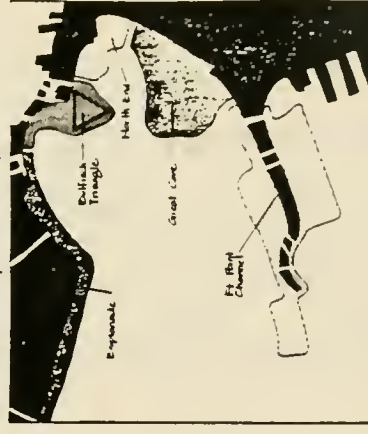
- New Streets, 1920-1980
- Remaining Streets, pre 1920
- - - - - Earliest Routes to the sea

### Sites & Structures

- New Structures, 1920-1980
- Remaining Structures, pre 1920

## The Pattern of Renewal

- Plans Largely Complete
- Proposed Comprehensive Redevelopment
- Scattered Projects but no Comprehensive Plan



1000'





Point Channel area began to serve regional, rather than international, markets. Some of the once busy Boston Wharf Company warehouses were razed and made into parking lots. And, as trucking and air freight out paced rail and shipping, the Fort Point Channel's advantages as an intermodal distribution point was lost.

Locally, other factors contributed further to the Channel's decline. The Mass Turnpike and South-East Expressway made trucking cheaper in the Boston area than rail. The Central Artery (1959) cut off the Leather District, South Station and Fort Point Channel area from Central Boston. The remaining South Bay was completely filled in by the 1960's negating the previous need for the Channel to remain open as a waterway. Dorchester Creek and the Roxbury Canal were culverted and emptied into the end of the Channel. The reclaimed South Bay became the location of the Southeast Expressway (1959), the incinerator (1958), the New Boston Meat and Poultry Market (1969), maintenance facilities for the MBTA and City (1970's), and the railroad yards.

As the wharves became un-used, much of the Channel's shoreline was replaced by non-maritime uses. The Gillette plant replaced the American Sugar Refinery operation on the east shore, and the United States Postal Service built a regional headquarters on the western shore.

Moveable span bridges over the Channel were largely transformed. Most bridges, when replaced or refitted were done so with a fixed span type to reduce congestion for the commuters and manufacturing firms which depended upon them for connection to Boston.

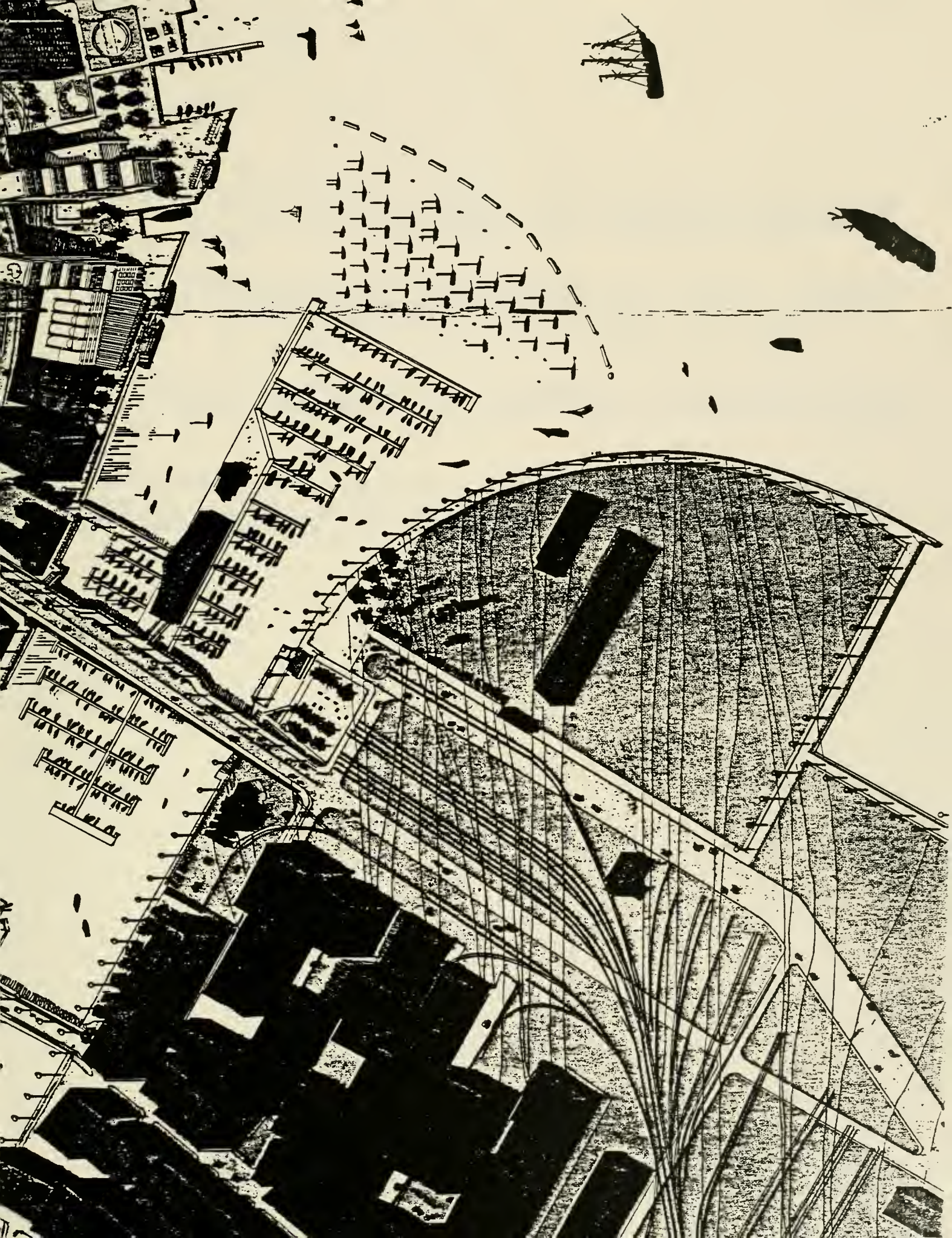


### Current Channel Uses

Thus, the remaining maritime uses are on the northern side of the Congress Street Bridges. The McKie Lighter Company, the Hook Lobster Company, and the Neptune Lobster Company are currently to the south of the current Northern Avenue Bridge. The McKie Lighter Company would be displaced by the proposed bridge relocation. The Children's Museum and Museum of Transportation would be to the south of the relocated bridge.

Many of the warehouse buildings formerly owned by the Boston Wharf Company are vacant. Many have been torn down to provide parking lots. Many of the warehouses that remain survive as printing houses, manufacturers of office equipment, mailing houses and supply houses. The underutilized warehouse buildings have spanned a growing artist community, which finds this type of space ideal for workshops and studios. Some of the buildings are being converted to residential space, following trends set on other Boston Waterfronts.





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## Foot notes

- 1) Boston Educational Marine Exchange. Boston Downtown Waterfront Project (Boston, July, 1980, Lane/Frenchman, Inc., Urban Design Consultant), pp. 23-26.

Boston Redevelopment Authority and Massachusetts Port Authority. Supplementary Report, Northern Avenue Bridge Replacement Study (January, 1980, Fay, Spofford & Thorndike, Inc., Wallace, Floyd, Ellenzweig, Moore, Inc.)

Massachusetts DPW. Feasibility Study, Replacement of Northern Avenue Bridge (1974, Universal Engineering, Inc.), pp. 7 & 8

New England Division, Army Corps of Engineers. Boston Harbor Floatable Debris: A Cultural Resource Reconnaissance Survey. (January, 1978: Public Archeology Laboratory, Dept. of Anthropology, Brown University).

